



FL PANHANDLE EDIBLES

GROWING GOOD

FREE STARTER GUIDE

Zone 9B Food Forest Starter Plant List

50+ hand-selected edible plants proven to thrive in the Florida Panhandle —
organized by layer, yield, and time to harvest.

YOUR COMPLETE PLANTING BLUEPRINT

50+

PROVEN PLANTS

7

FOREST LAYERS

300+

DAY GROWING SEASON

3-5×

HIGHER YIELDS

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Growing Good Since Day One

YOUR ZONE 9B BLUEPRINT

How to Use This Guide

"Research from established Florida food forests shows that proper layer stacking can support 100+ productive species on a quarter-acre lot, generating yields 3–5 times higher per square foot than monoculture orchards — while requiring 60–70% less maintenance once the system matures."

Zone 9B at a Glance

Zone 9B Florida occupies a unique niche where subtropical and temperate climates converge. Minimum winter temperatures of 25–30°F are offset by a 300–350 day growing season and year-round production potential impossible in colder climates.

Key challenge: Sandy "sugar sand" soil with only 1–2% organic matter. The solution is to build soil on top rather than amend the sand below.

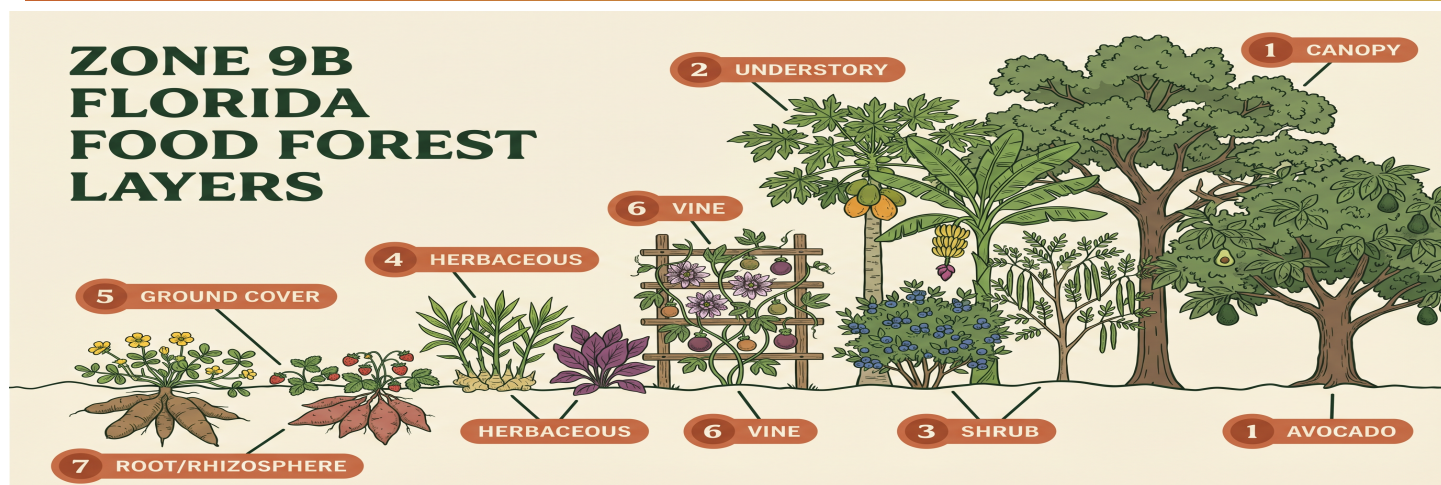
How to Read Each Plant Entry

Every plant in this guide includes:

1. Layer — which of the 7 food forest layers it occupies
 2. Time to first harvest — so you can plan succession
 3. Yield estimate — realistic production per plant/year
 4. Key notes — Zone 9B-specific tips from our nursery
- Plants marked **Priority** are our top recommendations for beginners.

STACKING FUNCTIONS FOR MAXIMUM ABUNDANCE

The 7-Layer Food Forest Structure



The 7 layers of a Zone 9B food forest — from underground roots to the 40-foot canopy. Each layer captures sunlight at a different height, dramatically multiplying yield per square foot.

Canopy (20–40+ ft)

Wind protection, microclimate creation, long-term nut/fruit production.
Key plants: Pecan, Avocado, Persimmon

Understory (10–20 ft)

The production powerhouse delivering the bulk of your fruit harvest. Key plants: Papaya, Banana, Fig, Loquat, Mulberry

Shrub (3–8 ft)

Intensive production zone for high-value berries and perennial vegetables.
Key plants: Blueberry, Chaya, Moringa, Surinam Cherry, Cherry of the Rio Grande

Herbaceous (1–3 ft)

Greatest species diversity. Perennial vegetables, herbs, and dynamic accumulators. Key plants: Ginger, Turmeric, Okinawa Spinach, Taro

Ground Cover (0–12 in)

Living mulch suppressing weeds, retaining moisture, and fixing nitrogen.
Key plants: Perennial Peanut, Sweet Potato, Strawberry

Vine (Vertical)

Maximizes 3D space using fences, trellises, and tree trunks. Key plants: Passion Fruit, Chayote, Muscadine, Malabar Spinach

PLAN YOUR SUCCESSION FOR YEAR-ROUND ABUNDANCE

Timeline to First Harvest

PLANT	TIME TO HARVEST	LAYER	NOTES
Malabar Spinach	6 weeks	VINE	Edible leaves in 6 weeks; heat-loving
Chaya	4 months	SHRUB	Year-round once established
Sweet Potato	4 months	ROOT	Leaves edible while waiting
Moringa	6 months	SHRUB	Cut & regrows in 8–10 weeks
Pigeon Pea	6 months	SHRUB	Also fixes nitrogen
Papaya	8 months	UNDERSTORY	50–150 lbs/year per tree
Banana	12 months	UNDERSTORY	Up to 4 harvests/year
Passion Fruit	18 months	VINE	50–100 fruits/vine/year
Surinam Cherry	18 months	SHRUB	30–50 lbs/year; 2 crops/year
Cherry of the Rio Grande	24 months	SHRUB	Sweet, cherry-like fruit; cold-hardy
Fig	24 months	UNDERSTORY	20–40 lbs/year
Mulberry	30 months	UNDERSTORY	20–40 lbs/year
Loquat	36 months	UNDERSTORY	Fruits Nov–March (off-season!)
Avocado Priority	84 months*	CANOPY	*Grafted Fantastic/Winter Mexican fruit in 2–3 yrs
Persimmon	36 months*	CANOPY	*Grafted trees; cold-hardy to 0°F

The Grafted Tree Advantage

Seedling Avocado trees can take 7–9 years to produce fruit. Our grafted Fantastic and Winter Mexican Avocado trees at FL Panhandle Edibles fruit in 2–3 years — the same plant, a fraction of the wait. This is the single most important purchasing decision you will make for your food forest.

20–40+ FEET • THE STRUCTURAL BACKBONE

Canopy Layer

Pecan

Carya illinoensis

NATIVE

The ultimate long-term investment. Native to the Southeast, cold-hardy, and capable of producing 50–200 lbs of premium nuts per year at maturity. Plant as your first canopy anchor.

→ Yield: 50–200 lbs/year at maturity

Persimmon

Diospyros virginiana / D. kaki — Fuyu / Hachiya

NATIVE

COLD-HARDY

American Persimmon (D. virginiana) is native to the Southeast and cold-hardy to -20°F. Asian varieties (Fuyu, Hachiya) produce large, sweet fruits. Both thrive in Zone 9B with minimal inputs and no pest pressure.

→ Yield: 25–100 lbs/year at maturity

Avocado Priority

Persea americana — Fantastic / Winter Mexican varieties

BUY GRAFTED

COLD-HARDY

Fantastic and Winter Mexican are the best Zone 9B varieties for cold tolerance. Grafted trees from our nursery fruit in 2–3 years vs. 7+ for seedlings. Plant on the south side of your property for frost protection.

→ Yield: 50–200 lbs/year (grafted)

10-20 FEET • THE PRODUCTION POWERHOUSE

Understory Layer

Papaya Priority

Carica papaya

PRIORITY

YEAR-ROUND

The fastest-producing tree in your food forest. Fruits in 8-10 months and produces continuously. Cold-sensitive below 32°F — plant in a protected microclimate or near a south-facing wall.

→ Yield: 50-150 lbs/year per tree

Banana Priority

Musa spp. — Cavendish / Dwarf varieties

PRIORITY

YEAR-ROUND

Up to 4 harvests per year possible in Zone 9B. Plant in clusters of 3-5 for wind protection and continuous production as pups replace the mother plant.

→ Yield: 30-100 lbs/cluster/year

Loquat Priority

Eriobotrya japonica

COLD-HARDY

WINTER HARVEST

One of the most underrated trees for Zone 9B. Fruits November-March when almost nothing else is producing — your off-season abundance machine. Cold-hardy to 12°F.

→ Yield: 50-100 lbs/year

Mulberry

Morus rubra / Morus alba — Everbearing

NATIVE

Everbearing mulberry produces for 9+ months in Zone 9B. Fast-growing and excellent for establishing canopy quickly while long-term trees mature.

→ Yield: 20-40 lbs/year

Fig

Ficus carica — Brown Turkey / Celeste

COLD-HARDY

Brown Turkey and Celeste are the best varieties for Zone 9B. Produces two crops per year (June and August-October). Extremely low maintenance and drought-tolerant.

→ Yield: 20-40 lbs/year

Jaboticaba

Plinia cauliflora

HIGH VALUE

Produces grape-like fruits directly on the trunk and branches. Highly ornamental and commands premium prices at farmers markets. Slow-growing but extremely long-lived and productive.

→ Yield: 20-50 lbs/year at maturity

3–8 FEET • INTENSIVE PRODUCTION ZONE

Shrub Layer

Blueberry

Vaccinium — Rabbiteye / S. Highbush

PH 4.5-5.5

Requires acidic soil (easily achieved with pine bark mulch) and specific low-chill varieties. Mature bushes yield 5–15 lbs per plant during the April–June harvest window.

→ Yield: 5–15 lbs/plant

Moringa

Moringa oleifera

N-FIXER

Cut to 3–4 ft and regrows 6–10 ft in just 8–10 weeks. Produces 30–50 lbs of nitrogen-rich biomass per cutting — perfect for chop-and-drop mulching. Leaves are 25–30% protein dry weight.

→ Yield: 30–50 lbs biomass/cutting

Surinam Cherry

Eugenia uniflora

YEAR-ROUND

HIGH VALUE

One of the most productive fruit shrubs for Zone 9B. Produces two crops per year with 30–50 lbs of tart, vitamin-rich cherries. Excellent for fresh eating, jams, and juices. Cold-hardy to 24°F and extremely heat-tolerant.

→ Yield: 30–50 lbs/year

Cherry of the Rio Grande

Eugenia aggregata

COLD-HARDY

HIGH VALUE

Produces sweet, dark-red cherries with a rich, complex flavor. One of the most underutilized high-value shrubs for Zone 9B. Cold-hardy to 22°F, drought-tolerant once established, and commands premium prices at farmers markets.

→ Yield: 10–20 lbs/year

Chaya (Tree Spinach)

Cnidoscolus aconitifolius

PRIORITY

YEAR-ROUND

Perhaps the most productive perennial vegetable for Zone 9B. Produces 50–100 lbs of edible leaves annually. Must be cooked to neutralize mild toxins. Thrives in heat and recovers rapidly from frost.

→ Yield: 50–100 lbs leaves/year

Katuk

Sauropus androgynus

SHADE-TOLERANT

Produces tender, protein-rich leaves (6–8% protein fresh weight) with a pea-like flavor. Grows 5–8 ft as a shade-tolerant shrub — perfect for planting beneath understory trees.

→ Yield: Continuous leaf harvest

Miracle Fruit

Synsepalum dulcificum

SPECIALTY

HIGH VALUE

Berries contain miraculin, which temporarily makes sour foods taste sweet. Extraordinary farmers market value at \$20–30 per fruit. A true conversation starter and premium crop.

→ Yield: Premium specialty crop

Lemongrass

Cymbopogon citratus

YEAR-ROUND

Compact culinary lemongrass clumps serve triple duty: aromatic border plant, pest-deterrent mulch when cut, and a high-demand culinary herb at farmers markets. Harvest stalks continuously year-round in Zone 9B.

→ Yield: Year-round continuous harvest

Pigeon Pea

Cajanus cajan

N-FIXER

A fast-growing nitrogen-fixing shrub that produces edible peas while building soil fertility. Chop-and-drop the branches as high-nitrogen mulch. Regrows vigorously after cutting.

→ Yield: 5–10 lbs peas + biomass/year

0-3 FEET • THE DIVERSITY ENGINE

Herbaceous Layer

Ginger & Turmeric

Zingiber officinale / Curcuma longa

SHADE-TOLERANT

HIGH VALUE

Thrive in partial shade beneath larger trees. Plant in late winter/early spring, harvest after 8–10 months. Produce 2–5 lbs of rhizomes per plant.

→ Yield: 2–5 lbs rhizomes/plant

Okinawa Spinach

Gynura crepidoides

YEAR-ROUND

Exceptional performance in Florida's heat and humidity. Produces succulent, nutty, mineral-rich leaves year-round. Tolerates both full sun and partial shade.

→ Yield: Year-round continuous harvest

Longevity Spinach

Gynura procumbens

MEDICINAL

Reputed medicinal properties including blood sugar regulation and anti-inflammatory effects. Grows as a 1–2 ft groundcover. Extremely low maintenance once established.

→ Yield: Continuous leaf harvest

Taro

Colocasia esculenta

SHADE-TOLERANT

Performs exceptionally well in wet areas or swales where other crops struggle. Grows 3–5 ft tall with starchy tubers harvested after 8–12 months.

→ Yield: 5–15 lbs tubers/plant

Society Garlic

Tulbaghia spp.

YEAR-ROUND

Provides year-round onion-flavored greens as an evergreen perennial. Exceptional pest resistance and drought tolerance.

→ Yield: Year-round harvest

0-12 INCHES • THE LIVING MULCH

Ground Cover Layer

Perennial Peanut

Arachis glabrata

N-FIXER

The gold standard nitrogen-fixing groundcover for subtropical food forests. Forms dense 6–12 inch mats that fix 40–60 kg of nitrogen per hectare annually.

→ Yield: 40–60 kg N/hectare/year

Sweet Potato

Ipomoea batatas

DUAL PURPOSE

Functions as both groundcover and root crop. Vining foliage spreads 10–20 feet while producing 5–15 lbs of tubers per plant after 4–5 months.

→ Yield: 5–15 lbs tubers/plant

Strawberry

Fragaria × ananassa — Sensation / Brilliance

WINTER HARVEST

Sensation, Brilliance, and Medallion varieties demonstrate best performance in Zone 9B's heat. Produces during winter months when little else is fruiting.

→ Yield: 0.5–2 lbs/plant (winter)

VERTICAL • MAXIMUM 3D SPACE USE

Vine Layer

Passion Fruit

Passiflora edulis / *P. incarnata*

FL NATIVE

P. edulis (tropical) produces 50–100 fruits/vine/year. *P. incarnata* (native Maypop) is cold-hardy to 0°F. Both grow vigorously 20–40 ft annually.

→ Yield: 50–100 fruits/vine/year

Chayote Squash

Sechium edule

YEAR-ROUND

Among the most productive vegetables possible in Zone 9B. Single vines produce 50–200+ fruits annually once established.

→ Yield: 50–200+ fruits/vine/year

Malabar Spinach

Basella alba / *B. rubra*

YEAR-ROUND

HEAT-LOVING

A vigorous climbing vine that thrives in Zone 9B's heat and humidity where regular spinach bolts immediately. Produces glossy, succulent leaves with a mild flavor. Harvest continuously from spring through fall. Edible in 6 weeks from planting.

→ Yield: Continuous leaf harvest

Muscadine Grape

Vitis rotundifolia — Carlos / Scuppernong

FL NATIVE

The only grape that truly thrives in Florida's humidity. Native species evolved to tolerate fungal disease that devastates European grapes.

→ Yield: 20–40 lbs/vine/year

SYSTEMS WITH 20–30% SERVICE PLANTS SHOW 40–60% HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY

Service Plants: The Functional Framework

Nitrogen-Fixers

Generate bioavailable nitrogen, eliminating or dramatically reducing fertilizer requirements.

- Moringa (*Moringa oleifera*)
- Pigeon Pea (*Cajanus cajan*)
- Ice Cream Bean (*Inga edulis*)
- Perennial Peanut (*Arachis glabrata*)
- Mexican Sunflower (*Tithonia*)
- Desmodium, Clover, Cowpeas

Dynamic Accumulators

Deep taproots access subsoil minerals and concentrate them in leaf tissue for chop-and-drop cycling.

- Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)
- Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)
- Lambsquarters (*Chenopodium*)
- Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)
- Amaranth (*Amaranthus* spp.)
- Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

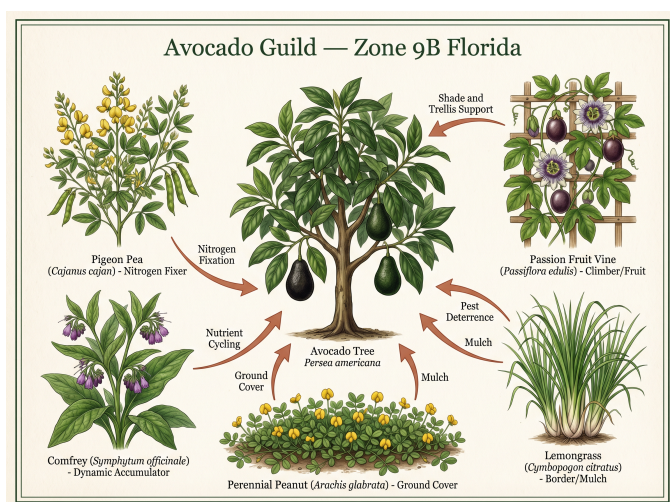
Pollinator Plants

Ensure fruit set and attract beneficial predatory insects that naturally control pest populations.

- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*)
- Coreopsis (native Florida)
- Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias*)
- Goldenrod (*Solidago*)
- Scarlet Sage (*Salvia coccinea*)
- Pentas, Firebush

A COMPLETE, SELF-SUSTAINING PLANTING DESIGN FOR ZONE 9B

The Avocado Guild: Your First Plant Community



What Is a Plant Guild?

A guild is a community of plants that work together to support a central species — in this case, your Avocado tree. Each plant performs a specific function: feeding the soil, attracting pollinators, suppressing weeds, or producing a secondary harvest.

The Avocado Guild Plant List

1. Avocado Tree (center) — the guild anchor
2. Pigeon Pea — nitrogen fixer, chop-and-drop mulch
3. Comfrey — dynamic accumulator, mineral cycling
4. Perennial Peanut — ground cover, N-fixer
5. Lemongrass — border/mulch, pest deterrent
6. Passion Fruit — vertical layer, additional fruit

Soil Prep: The Non-Negotiable First Step

Before planting, build your soil on top of the sand:

1. Lay cardboard directly on sand (weed barrier)
2. Add 3–4 inches well-aged compost
3. Add 3–4 inches composted manure
4. Top with 8–12 inches wood chips
5. Install irrigation before planting

Ready to Start Your Zone 9B Food Forest?

Visit FL Panhandle Edibles to find all the plants in this guide in stock — including our grafted Avocado (Fantastic & Winter Mexican), Persimmon, and rare tropical varieties. Our team can help you select the right plants for your specific space, soil, and goals.

VISIT OUR NURSERY OR SHOP ONLINE

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